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# Inside Washington

## Viet "Bloodbath" Fears Confirmed by Expert

Research Associate D. Gareth Porter of Cornell University, who has become the chief American defender against charges that Hanoi has engaged in mass murder, has been sharply challenged by Robert F. Turner, now at the Hoover Institution in Palo Alto, Calif.

In a letter to the *Washington Post* last week, Turner recorded that during the last two years he had worked for the North Vietnamese Affairs Division of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, a branch of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

"I followed," wrote Turner, "the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong radio and press, read thousands of classified captured documents, interviewed scores of important North Vietnamese and Viet Cong defectors, and traveled widely throughout the country investigating incidents of Viet Cong terrorism.

"I have discussed the 'land reform' bloodbath [that took place in 1956 when Hanoi carried out its land reform program] with Dr. [Hoang Van] Chi [who wrote of the bloodbath he witnessed in North Viet Nam], with North Vietnamese defectors who witnessed the program in various parts of the country, and with two senior defectors who actively participated in the campaign as 'People's Court' judges and Communist party members...."

In conversation with witnesses from scattered areas of North Viet Nam, asserted Turner, "I have concluded that the total number of deaths from the 'People's Courts' and the 'policy of isolation'...



averaged something over three per cent. Whether the actual bloodbath was 300,000 or 500,000 [as estimated by Dr. Chi]—it is quite clear that a major purge did occur and that the casualties numbered in six digits...."

This conclusion, Turner added, is also shared by P.J. Honey, a British scholar considered the most knowledgeable Western authority on North Vietnamese affairs, and by Gerard Tongas, a French professor who prior to 1959 was sympathetic to Hanoi and had more freedom of movement inside North Viet Nam.

Porter, whose views have been trumpeted by McGovern supporters, charges "there was no such policy of isolating families, even of those landlords sentenced for serious crimes during the land reform...."

Yet *Nhan Dan*, the official newspaper of the Communist party in Hanoi, says Turner, featured in its issue No. 4 (Nov. 5, 1956) an article by Nguyen Huu Dang which noted that the "'agrarian reform'" had "'left innocent children to die of starvation.'"

This, says Turner, was the policy of isolation which Dr. Chi discusses, and Chi "is right when he notes that this part of the 'land reform' produced the majority of casualties. The Lao Dong party knew that these children, old people, and other relatives of 'landlords' (and certainly a large percentage of those executed were in no way true landlords) would be unlikely to support the regime after having seen their relatives murdered by the 'People's Courts.' Rather than allow potentially hostile children to grow up and challenge the party's leadership, the children were forced to starve to death."

Some 18 months ago, Turner continued, he and a friend got together a group of the most senior defectors in the Viet Nam war. The group included three North Vietnamese army colonels, security specialists, and probably the most important propaganda cadre to abandon the Communist cause in the entire war.

The group then showed these men a Vietnamese-language translation of an article Porter had written, suggesting there would be no bloodbath and denying that large numbers of civilians had been executed by the Communists in Hué during the Tet offensive.

"We wanted to see," said Turner, "how these real 'experts'—men who between them had perhaps 80 years of Communist party membership and experience—would react. Every single one of them said that Porter was wrong."

"They spoke of the 'Blood-Debt' lists which the Viet Cong have been making of their 'enemies.' I knew of these lists because I had personally read dozens of captured documents from all over South Viet Nam giving instructions on their preparation.

"We asked North Vietnamese Army Col. Tran Van Dac (also known as 'Tam Ha'), how many South Vietnamese citizens were on the lists. He estimated there were between three and five million names on the lists, and Dac's estimate was confirmed by the other defectors.

"Col. Dac mentioned some of the people who are likely targets: all village and hamlet officials (elected or appointed), and government officials of higher levels; policemen and soldiers; members of religious and political organizations; defectors; people who have worked for the Americans or for other foreigners; landlords; and people who are directly related to any of the above."

basis that so many children and old people were